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The Voices of Nature and Urban Anxiety: A Comparative Ecocritical Reading of Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan

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Abstract

This paper attempts an ecocritical comparative study of the poetry of Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan by examining their representation of nature, environment and human existence. Mamang Dai's poetry reflects an indigenous ecological consciousness where rivers, mountains and forests are presented as living and spiritual entities closely connected with culture, memory and identity. Her works emphasize harmony between humans and nature while expressing concern over environmental destruction and cultural displacement caused by modernization. In contrast, Anjum Hasan portrays the realities of urban life, highlighting emotional isolation, ecological loss and the anxiety created by industrialization and urbanization. Through images of crowded cities, fading natural spaces and fragmented relationships, Hasan presents the psychological effects of environmental alienation. The paper argues that both poets, despite their contrasting poetic settings, reveal the deep interconnection between ecology, culture and human emotions, thereby foregrounding the importance of ecological awareness in contemporary literature.

Keywords: *Ecology, voices, nature, exploitation, human emotion.*

Introduction

Though Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan seem to present different experiences of the relationship between human beings and nature yet through their poetry explores ecological concerns from contrasting environments and emotional perspectives. Both seem to emphasize the importance of ecological awareness and thus their poetry shows that ecology is not just about protecting the environment but also about preserving culture, identity, emotional wellbeing and humanity itself.

Let's now explore how these two writers, despite their contrast, share a similar conceptual framework. It can be said that Mamang Dai views ecology as a living and spiritual relationship between humans and nature. In her poems, rivers, mountains, forests and rain are not lifeless objects rather part of human existence and cultural identity. Her ecological vision can be considered deeply influenced by the indigenous traditions of Arunachal Pradesh, where nature is respected and protected as sacred. She seems to believe that humans and nature should coexist peacefully and warns that modernization and environmental destruction threaten both nature and traditional ways of life. She gives nature a living presence and a voice of its own. In her poems, we find the most important feature that in ecological vision humans and nature are interconnected. Her poetry reflects a worldview in which humans do not dominate nature but live alongside maintaining a balance and harmony, which is of course, the ecological idea to Dai's poetic essence.

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Discussion

Anjum Hasan presents nature through the lens of urban life and modern anxiety, reflecting concern about pollution, overcrowded cities, emotional isolation and the disappearance of natural spaces. We can here claim that Hasan's ecological view is less spiritual and more critical of contemporary society. We can see in her poetry how urbanization and consumer culture have distanced people from nature, creating loneliness and emotional emptiness, showing nature as weak, absent or overshadowed by concrete structures of lifestyles. She is of the view that ecological damage may affect human emotions and relationships. Her poetry basically doesn't just carry hills, weather, trees or places as background but affect the feeling, thoughts and memories of the people. Her idea exerts that 'people do not live apart from nature; they live within it'. Thus, the ecocritical idea in Hasan's poetry is not scenery but a shaping force.

In 1990's, Ecocriticism, as a response to the growing awareness of ecological crises, was established as an interdisciplinary field of literary and cultural analysis. It is basically a study of the relationship between literature and environment, a critical examination of how nature is represented in contemporary writings that allows scholars to understand how literature responds to critiques and reshapes social attitudes towards nature. Basically, it is a tool to visualize narrative strategies, symbolic landscapes, ecological metaphors and environmental ethics in the literary world. The need to study ecocriticism as a concept is necessary because literature can shape the way we think about the environment around us, making us more aware of environmental problems and help us read texts in a deeper and meaningful way. It encourages readers to think about how nature is presented in works and how human actions affect the environment. Through ecocriticism, literature becomes a medium to spread awareness about environmental problems such as pollution, climate change, destruction of forests and loss of wildlife and so on, reminding us that nature is not only a source of beauty but also essential for human survival. In the works of many writers, nature is treated as a medium to express emotions, cultural values and social concerns and here ecocriticism helps readers to understand deeper meanings. The idea also develops a sense of responsibility and respect toward the environment by showing the harmful consequences of exploiting nature. The concept of ecocriticism can also be applied to literary readings carefully examining the role of nature in the writings of poems or dramas or novels etc. In literary texts, representations of nature often extend beyond their physical significance and symbolically convey ideas and knowledge related to peace, freedom, culture, emotion, and tradition. In many romantic poems, nature is shown as healing and comforting, while in modern literature it may appear damaging for industrialization and urbanization. By connecting literary themes with real environment issues, readers gain both literary understanding and environmental awareness. Similarly, the idea of ecocriticism can be closely related to the poetry of Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan because both poets present a deep connection between human life and nature in their works. Like in Dai's poetry, nature is not shown merely as scenery but as living and spiritual force closely connected with tribal culture, memory and identity. In Anjum Hasan's poetry, this idea is seen through her depiction of modern urban lode and its distance from nature.

Mamang Dai treats nature in her poetry as a living, spiritual and inseparable part of human life. In her famous poem "Small Towns and the Rivers", Dai presents the river as a symbol of memory, continuity and emotional truth. The lines- '*The river has a soul'(*Dai, 2004, pp.12) tells us that nature possesses life and spirit. The river is not merely flowing water but carries stories of generations, human suffering, silence and history. Her poem reflects how people living close to nature develop emotional depth and collective memory and thus the river becomes a witness to life itself. This image is suggestive of modern society that often fails to understand the emotional and spiritual importance of nature. Another poem by her, namely, "The Voice of the Mountain", presents the mountain as an ancient observer of human civilization, where the mountain speaks with patience, reminding humans of their temporary existence compared to nature's permanence. Here, Dai appears to personify the mountain to show that nature contains knowledge beyond human understanding, reflecting ecocritical ideas as it challenges the human-centered belief that only humans possess consciousness.

We can visualize Dai's poetry as an expression about modernization and environmental destruction. Although she celebrates nature, there is often a quiet fear that urbanization, deforestation and cultural loss are damaging both the environment and indigenous identity. In several of her poems, the disappearance of forests and traditional lifestyles symbolize the weakening of human connection with the earth. Though she does not present this loss in an aggressive political tone, rather appears through sadness, reflection and nostalgia. Here, we must talk about the connection between landscape and identity reflected in her poems, as for her, lands are not just geographical space but a force that shapes language, memory customs and existence. The mountains and rivers of Arunachal Pradesh become symbols of belonging, suggesting when nature is destroyed, cultural identity is threatened and this idea is specifically important in the concept of ecocriticism as it links environmental preservation with cultural survival. In her collection "River Poem", Dai glorifies images of rain, mist, rivers, birds and forests. These natural elements supposedly create a peaceful yet powerful atmosphere and thus nature acts as a healer and guide. Even '*silence*' in her poetry feels meaningful because it reflects the calm rhythm of the natural world. Dai uses simple lyrical language with rich imagery. She frequently uses personification, symbolism and oral storytelling techniques that connect her poetry to her belongings. In poems like "The Voice of the Mountain", Dai present's nature as wise and eternal. The mountain speaks like a living being and becomes a symbol of strength, history and truth. She suggests through this poem that nature has its own voice and humans must learn to listen to it instead of exploiting it. The poem delivers ecocritical ideas because it gives importance to the natural world and criticizes human ignorance toward the environment.

"My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks, In the transfer of symbols
I am the chance syllable that order the world instructed with history and
Miracles" (Dai, 2011, pp.16-18)

Likewise, in "An Obscure Place" the description of beauty and mystery of the land of Northeast India is shown and the pain caused by violence and human disturbances. Nature, in the poem appears pure and enduring despite human conflicts, highlighting the ecocritical belief that nature continues to exist beyond human destruction, yet it suffers because of human actions.

"There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.
We climb every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet.
An obscure place haunts the hunter."- (Dai,2006)

These lines resonate with Dai's poetic voice for ecocriticism. She encourages readers to respect nature, protect the environment and remember the traditional harmony between humans and the natural world.

In contrast to Mamang Dai's poetry, Anjum Hasan's works focuses much on the effects of urbanization, modern life and human alienation from the natural world. In her poetry we find the reflection of how city life, technology and modernisation create emotional emptiness and distance people from nature. Through simple but thoughtful images, Hasan tries to highlight the loss of natural beauty and the loneliness of modern existence. She often presents cities as crowded, mechanical and disconnected from the peaceful rhythm of the natural world. What can be observed in her poetry; nature appears limited, fading or interrupted by urban surroundings. This distinction between nature and urban life reflects ecocritical concerns about environmental degradation and the loss of harmony between humans and the environment. Her poems are suggestive of the fact that modern society has become too focused on material progress, ignoring the importance of nature and emotional balance. In her collection "Street on the Hill", Hasan uses images of hills, rain, trees, roads, birds and changing weather to contrast the calmness of nature with the restless atmosphere of city life, natural elements appear briefly among concrete buildings and crowded streets, visualising that nature is slowly disappearing from everyday human experiment. She describes silence, empty streets, smoke,

dust and artificial surroundings and such images create a sense of alienation and show how urban life can become emotionally dry and disconnected from the natural world. Even when nature appears in her poetry, it is often distant or interrupted symbolizing humanity's broken relationship with the environment. In the poems like "A Place Like Water" explores inner emotional landscapes with physical surrounding-

> '*All through the day it stays: the sadness of coming*
> *Into a wet city at dawn, not speaking, neither of us,*
> *When one by one the neon lights wake us from a cramped '*(Hasan, 2016, pp.1-3)

The absence of nature in urban settings mirrors feelings of isolation, anxiety and emptiness in human life. This connection between environmental loss and emotional suffering is an important aspect of ecocriticism. Through her subtle and reflective style, Hasan encourages readers to notice how modern lifestyles affect nature and human emotions as well.

In poems like "Late Summer and Mornings" she writes about flowering trees, butterflies, sunlight and changing seasons in a very natural and emotional way.

> *"evenings untouched by mornings. The ghee light*
> *pouring over*
> *streets and terraces out of a bottomless sky, loving*
> *everything"*-- .(Hasan, 2018, pp. 1-2)

Her "To The Chinese Restaurant" talks about city life as such, where nature remains present through descriptions of hills, weather and the town's landscape, a portrayal of Shillong's landscape and atmosphere. The poem blends human life with elements of nature such as hills, mist and the town's sloping roofs, showing how closely people are connected to their surroundings. Through these she presents nature not as a background element but as a living force that sleeps memory, identity and culture making her work significant from an ecocritical perspective.

Conclusion

Thus when we are to show the voice i.e. *The Voices of Nature and Urban Anxiety* both these poets successfully explore the relationship between human beings and the environment through different poetic visions and experiences. Though their poetic worlds are shaped by contrasting landscapes, rooted in the natural and indigenous environment of Northeast India and the other influenced by modern urban life, both writers ultimately express deep ecological concerns and highlight the emotional, cultural and spiritual importance of nature in human existence. The study reveals that Mamang Dai presents nature as sacred, living and inseparable from human identity. Her poems celebrate rivers, mountains, forests and rain not merely as physical elements but as carriers of memory, history, wisdom and cultural continuity. Through personification, symbolism and indigenous sensibility, Dai gives nature a voice and reminds readers that humans are only one part of a larger ecological system. Her poetry reflects the ecocritical belief that harmony between humans and nature is essential for both environmental balance and cultural survival. At the same time, her works express concern over modernization, deforestation and the gradual disappearance of traditional values, showing how ecological destruction also leads to cultural and emotional loss. On the other hand, Anjum Hasan represents ecology through the realities of urban life, emotional isolation and modern anxiety. Her poetry portrays crowded cities, artificial surroundings, pollution and fragmented human relationships, emphasizing how urbanization distances people from nature and creates inner emptiness. Unlike Dai's spiritual and harmonious vision of nature, Hasan presents nature as fading, interrupted or absent within modern city life. Yet, even in its absence, nature remains deeply significant because its loss directly affects human emotions, memory and psychological wellbeing. Through subtle imagery and reflective language,

Hasan exposes the emotional consequences of environmental degradation and modern consumer culture. As Glotfelty(1996) suggests, ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment, both Mamang Dai and Anjum Hasan successfully reflect this relationship through their poetic treatment of nature and urban life. Similarly, Buell's(1995) idea of environmental imagination can be applied to Dai's spiritual landscapes and Hasan's urban ecological concerns. The comparative study of these two poets clearly demonstrates that ecocriticism is not limited to the celebration of landscapes or environmental beauty; rather, it examines the deeper connection between ecology, culture, identity and human emotions. Both poets, despite their different styles and settings, encourage readers to rethink humanity's relationship with nature and recognize the harmful consequences of ecological imbalance. Their poetry suggests that environmental crises are also human crises because the destruction of nature weakens emotional stability, cultural roots and social harmony.

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